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ABSTRACT

Demographic trends show that non-anglo and limited English proficient (LEP) populations are increasing dramatically in public schools. They already make up the majority of the student body in California's largest urban school districts. They are also disproportionately susceptible to dropping out. This Congressional testimony presents approaches that can improve schooling for students from diversified language and cultural backgrounds. The following approaches for dropout prevention, whose success is demonstrated through experience or research, are discussed: (1) small-scale curriculum development efforts and curriculum materials, especially for teaching LEP students; (2) innovative teacher and administrator recruitment, training, and credential programs; (3) high school programs with a direct link to the economy and employment; (4) alternative post-elementary academic programs; (5) innovative continuation high school programs; and (6) special involvement programs for parents and communities to decrease absenteeism and improve performance. In order to help schools implement these approaches, a standard definition of dropouts and standard procedures for calculating and reporting dropout statistics must be instituted. In addition, documentation of successfully operating dropout programs must provide the type of information school districts need to replicate those successes, parent and community involvement must be strengthened, and resources must be found that better align English instruction and materials to LEP students' proficiencies. (PS)

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CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
EDUCATION AND LABOR COMMITTEE

STATEMENT PREPARED FOR THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON ELEMENTARY, SECONDARY, AND VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

Los Angeles, California
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I am Patricia Milazzo, Assistant Director for Programs at the Southwest Regional Education Laboratory in Southern California. I wish to thank the Subcommitte for the opportunity to testify on dropout prevention and bilingual education. It is indeed a privilege to share this R&D summary with the Subcommittee.

The public, our state and local governments, and the research community all recognize that the dropout problem affects all ethnic and language groups across all the economic strata. And, as I point out shortly, many promising approaches are appropriate for dropout prevention in general, regardless of language and culture. However, we should also recognize that this problem characterizes non-anglo and Limited English Proficient (often abbreviated as LEP) populations disproportionately--and these groups are increasing dramatically in our public schools. There is a critical need for special programs that accommodate the changing populations in our public schools.

I'll spend just a minute describing the general demographic landscape of tomorrow and its implications for the future dropout problem. A host of recent reports conclude that ethnic minorities will soon be a large proportion of the population of the United States (some say one third) and an even larger proportion of the population of California (some predict two-thirds). While virtually all public school districts will need to accommodate this new student body, it is in the urban centers that school districts will be most strained to meet students' needs. They are hard pressed right now. A large mass of non-anglo students, primarily Hispanic but with tremendously fast growth rates among Asians, are moving through the primary grades of urban schools. These students are less affluent and they represent diverse language and cultural backgrounds. They already are the majority of the student body in California's largest urban school districts. Moreover, political analysts tell us that we are likely to see current trends in immigration into California (and California's public schools) continue. As non-anglo and LEP students constitute a larger and larger proportion of the public school population, logic and simple arithmetic lead us to expect higher and higher dropout rates.

So, what works to improve schooling for students from diversified language and cultural backgrounds? Research gives us some insights into answers to this question, and school districts themselves are an invaluable information source on current approaches to dropout prevention. Much of the following discussion on promising dropout prevention programs is taken from a report by the Association of California Urban School Districts--"Dropouts from California's Urban School Districts: Who are they? How do we count them? How can we hold them?" The Association, a consortium of California's largest school districts--often referred to as the Big 19, established a task force on dropouts which met several times in 1985 to develop a profile of the dropout, describe problems and solutions for accurate dropout accounting, and to outline promising approaches for getting the dropout problem under control.

I'll present six general categories where programs are either currently in use or where the research suggests that specific approaches could be successful for non-anglo and LEP students. These include 1) small-scale curriculum development efforts, 2) innovative teacher and administrator training and credentialing programs, 3) high school programs which have a direct link to the economy, 4) alternative post-elementary academic programs, 5) innovative continuation high school programs, and 6) special involvement programs for parents and communities.

As I discuss these options, an important distinction should be kept in mind--large numbers of Hispanic dropouts are already bilingual; many are monolingual English; few are monolingual Spanish. These distinctions are important because successful dropout prevention efforts aimed at ethnic groups which have a language as part of their cultural heritage will need to make different instructional accommodations for the different groups.

The majority of Hispanic dropouts are already bilingual and many are English dominant. They are products of our schooling system. These are students who start in our schools in the elementary grades, many in kindergarten, and move through the system to twelfth grade. For such students, specialized non-English curriculum materials may not be as important as, for example, intensive parent and teacher education programs.

On the other hand, there are potential LEP dropouts who come to California schools as new arrivals from another country with little or no proficiency in English. Many of these students enter into the intermediate and post elementary grades. These students will surely need specialized curriculum materials, as well as a different variety of parent, community, and teacher resources.

1) ONE AREA OF PROMISING INITIATIVES RELATES TO CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

Educational research conducted over the past 20 years shows emphatically that the most powerful resources that schools have (other than teachers) are curriculum materials. Components in today's typical curriculum are designed to move native English speakers along smoothly from grade to grade. However, we only need to look at the latest round of achievement results to see that the curriculum doesn't always deliver for its intended native English speaking audience. In fact, many native English speakers who have grown up in an English speaking culture fall behind and fail. But this same curriculum has far more negative consequences for students of Spanish and Asian heritages whose special needs have not been a traditional stimulus for curriculum development efforts.

There are some things that we can do to make the curriculum work better for these students almost immediately. None of the approaches I'm

about to describe requires a massive development effort. Moreover, this type of curriculum development effort can be completed for a national, or at least, regional market so that each new school district does not have to start from scratch in order to implement the following suggestions.

One of the first things that can be done to help schooling work better for LEP students is to align the curriculum in English so that it takes advantage of proficiencies that student's already have in their native language. Data show that this kind of instructional accommodation is tremendously important in the earliest years of a student's schooling experience, before they begin a cycle of failure that leads to high absenteeism and eventually to dropping out. I'll list a few promising curriculum efforts:

Alignment of instructional vocabulary: This process undertakes an alignment of a fairly technical vocabulary that lies at the heart of school instruction whether it be in English or a second language. It analyzes the language of instruction in English and the second language and identifies a core of terms that relate closely to classroom instruction in either language. Special materials are then developed to accomplish two ends. One is to train monolingual English teachers in the foreign language analog of these terms; the other is to help LEP students learn the English analogs.

Alignment of instruction with first language proficiencies: This process shows teachers and administrators how to align information from tests in English with information from tests in a second language to determine the kinds of proficiencies that students have. It also enables teachers to integrate curriculum materials in another language with their own English language instruction to enrich instruction for LEP students.

Use of first language and second language resources to avoid the risk of remediation: A number of studies have shown that a long history of failure in school is the most salient feature of a dropout population, regardless of culture or language. According to a recent report by the Los Angeles Unified School District, dropouts were not promoted to a next grade in school five times more often than students who eventually graduated. Any student who fails either first or second grade has only a twenty percent chance of graduating. For Hispanics, retention at any grade appears to have a very serious impact on future graduation prospects.

Schools may be more successful in controlling future dropout rates by implementing an alternative to the remediation and retention model in the elementary grades. No one favors social promotions. But retention of students behind their age-grade peers is no panacea either. A few precisely targeted instructional materials in a language that the student knows best can shore up the use of English textbooks over several grade levels and avoid heavy remediation in subsequent grades, or worse, retention in a lower grade. The intention is to get students past some points in reading and mathematics where faltering instruction on a few

very critical skills runs a high risk of causing students to fall behind. This model should be appropriate for all high risk students, regardless of language background.

Materials that are specially tailored to the the bilingual aide: Surveys conducted throughout the country show that because of the shortage of bilingual teachers, bilingual teacher aides often have much heavier responsibilities in teaching and guidance than their counterparts in English classrooms. However, much of the aide's on-the-job preparation for interaction with students and materials is informal. Furthermore, there are few teaching tools that have been tailored for this paraprofessional group. Staff development programs and training materials that are specifically targeted on the bilingual aide's use of classroom teaching and practice resources could go a long way toward improving the classroom instruction of LEP students, and subsequently toward lowering dropout rates.

Opening of course options for students whose basic language and mathematics skills are several years behind their age-grade peers: In the post elementary grades, many LEP students and members of other population subgroups are channeled into remedial courses, or into clusters of non-academic courses. Usually it's because students' basic proficiencies in reading and mathematics are well below average for their expected grade level. Research shows that, on the average, dropouts were performing at the fifth grade level in reading and mathematics at the time they left school. The relationship between enrollment in remedial or non-academic coursework and dropping out of school is very strong. While it is difficult to accommodate large numbers of students who are below grade level in reading and mathematics, many high schools are making new efforts to compensate for remedial needs in regular academic courses.

Task analyses of the reading and mathematics requirements in typical entry level courses for fields such as drafting or accounting show that students who have moderate difficulties in reading and mathematics should be able to successfully negotiate entry level work in such non-remedial courses. High school departments will need to be more flexible in opening up these and other courses to students who may not have the required prerequisites; and department staff will need to make a commitment to promoting as many moderate risk students as the department can effectively handle.

2) A SECOND AREA OF PROMISE RELATES TO THE RECRUITMENT AND TRAINING OF TEACHERS AND ADMINISTRATORS

A number of dropout studies cite a common student perception that teachers and administrators lack interest in and involvement with them as a serious factor in their decision to leave school. Given the shortage of teachers and administrators with language and cultural backgrounds similar to that of LEP students, this perception must be especially poignant for LEP students.

This aspect of the dropout problem will likely continue for school districts for a long time to come. Data show that the teaching force is already more than 90% anglo. New data from colleges and universities show that the fundamental shortage of teachers of Hispanic and Asian heritage won't improve very much any time soon. In 1983, less than 2% of the BA's graduating from college and qualified to teach were Hispanic. Less than 1% were Asian. The majority of these graduates are choosing non-teaching careers. Most of the Big 19 school districts already have a large investment in recruiting bilingual teachers, but they will not be able to keep up with the tremendous growth in their Asian and Hispanic student populations. Because administrators typically come from the teacher pool, there is currently almost no fit between administrators and students of similar ethnic heritage.

A few things can help, however. Credentialing of teachers and administrators could become more sensitive to the language and cultural conditions of the community to be served. In spite of the tremendous need for bilingual teachers, credentialing requirements often make it difficult to accommodate the special circumstances of the bilingual teacher who may not be as proficient in English as a native English speaker, but who is trained and qualified to teach specific areas of subject matter. For example, in California we are told that about 35% of the Asians and 40% of the Hispanics who take the CBEST test do not pass it. Some Asian and Hispanic groups feel that we need to take a serious look at CBEST results, to see to what extent the problem these prospective teachers have relates more to their difficulty with English and not so much to what they know.

Similar innovations would help in the recruitment and training of school administrators. School administration--which is ultimately the driving force behind new programs and new priorities--does not reflect the ethnic and language composition of the students served, at least not in many California school districts.

Finally, survey results show that the typical teacher, regardless of ethnic heritage, may not expect high academic accomplishments from non-anglo and LEP students. On the other hand, research on effective schools shows that programs which encourage teachers to increase their expectations for all students, regardless of background, can have very desirable consequences.

3) A THIRD PROMISING AREA FOR DROPOUT PREVENTION RELATES TO EDUCATION AND WORK.

This kind of initiative has perhaps the most promise and power for retaining borderline students in school. Researchers have been telling us for several years that schooling programs need to be realistic about the apparent state of the economy and the relationship of education to employment. Most of the programs that I'll describe are intended for grades 9-12, and most are appropriate for all students who may be at risk of dropping out.

California's Regional Occupation Programs or Centers are an excellent example of credited work experience programs that draw and hold students. ROP centers were established to supplement occupational training offerings at local high schools, and they are based on the notion of a shared-time facility. ROP centers offer only vocational educational instruction to students in a district or region. Students get their academic instruction in the regular high school. The ROP's have been very popular with both students and industry because the scope of training opportunities is very broad; they provide occupation-specific training as well as daily contact with prospective employers; and high school students can get full elective credits for their study. In 1983 there were 68 ROP centers in California with an enrollment of 124,000 students. Until recently, these centers have grown steadily since the start of the program in 1968.

Other work experience programs and career center models currently operating have promise for retaining potential dropouts. Some of these programs work within the conventional school structure and others create innovative alternatives for school structures. All offer some form of occupational training, work experience, individualized instruction, or independent study. The most successful ones offer credit for work experience. I'll name a few examples:

The Center for Employment Training in San Jose has a state-approved alternative high school on its premises for students under 18 who want to take advantage of the Center's program. The alternative high school provides students with ten hours per week of state required classes and GED preparation. The center itself provides training in 17 different skill areas. All occupational and academic programs are conducted on an open-entry/open-exit basis, permitting trainees to begin at their own level and advance at their own rate.

The **Las Vegas Storefront School** in Nevada has a program that targets in-school potential dropouts. It combines the concepts of alternative education and remunerative work experience to offer interested youth an opportunity to complete requirements for a high school diploma. Individualized, streamlined instruction is provided in classrooms that are set up in a local shopping mall. Students study required subjects for a total of ten hours per week, and they also work in the mall shops and earn money 20 to 30 hours per week.

Career Center Models operate in a number of California school districts such as San Diego Unified School District, Modesto City High School District, and Santa Ana Unified School District. The career center either offers directly or it coordinates basic career orientation courses that explore such areas as work habits, work attitudes, and career decision-making skills. Career center programs can be integrated with a number of other occupational training and work experience programs. In districts like Modesto and Santa Ana, career centers work closely with the ROP centers I described previously.

Work/study Programs are designed to fit the needs of students who must work during the day. While few of these programs provide credit for work experience, they do accommodate the student who must work. Among other things, these programs provide an extended day program that allows students to earn credits before and after the conventional school hours. Fullerton Unified High School has an excellent work study program. So does Los Angeles Unified School District. Los Angeles City Schools has recently begun a similar program that appears to have great drawing power.

Finally, most schools, in cooperation with business and industry, can quickly and inexpensively provide students and parents with an **orientation on the importance of a high school diploma for career intentions.** Dropouts often are not told a simple truth about today's employment market--no diploma, no job. The Department of Labor projects that by 1990 about 95% of the labor force will have (and need) at least a high school diploma. If we combine this fact with a 4-5% unemployment rate, it is reasonable to assume that the majority of the unemployed will be school dropouts. A new study of data from the High School and Beyond project shows that two years after leaving school almost 30% of the dropouts were looking for jobs. And those students who did work full time were in low-skilled, low paying, dead end jobs. What do dropouts think of their decision to leave school? Followup data from California's Big 19 school districts show that as many as 40% of the dropouts in some districts recognize that leaving school was a bad decision and return to some kind of schooling agency.

4) A FOURTH PROMISING INITIATIVE RELATES TO ALTERNATIVE ACADEMIC STRUCTURES

Research shows that academic schooling alternatives that provide streamlined instruction, sometimes leading to the GED or some other high school equivalency diploma, can be successful in holding certain types of students. David Stern at Berkeley has found that independent study programs can be very attractive to older students who don't fit well into traditional instruction groups, or for students who simply are seeking an alternative to the conventional school structure. San Francisco's Independence High School is a good example of a self-contained high school for independent study. Students follow a contractual-based program of study to complete high school, to prepare for the California Proficiency High School Examination or the GED, or to earn credits during vacations.

The GED is an option that many, many students discover and pursue, but only after dropping out of school. Most GED programs require students to attend class for a total of 10 hours per week. During this time they prepare to pass the very demanding GED. A few districts make this sort of programming available to their regular high school students as an acceptable alternative route to a high school diploma. Data show that employers do not discriminate between the GED and the standard high school diplomma in their hiring practices. In fact, employer surveys show that the GED is highly valued by prospective employers.

Other alternatives include a five-year high school graduation plan versus a four-year plan. Some recent data show that some students perform better and remain in school if a little of the pressure of the four-year course load is relieved, and they plan to complete their high school program in five years with a lightened course load. This type of structure has to be considered very carefully, however, for some groups, in particular Hispanic males who do not tend to stay in school beyond the age of 18.

5) A FIFTH PROMISING INITIATIVE INVOLVES A NEW LOOK AT CONTINUATION HIGH SCHOOLS

New approaches in the structure and operation of continuation high schools would affect large numbers of potential dropouts in California and, quite likely, the rest of the country. Although neither independent research nor formal reports by school districts have much to say about continuation high schools, this model is the most widely used one in California for handling potential dropouts. Generally these programs are designed to prepare students to reenter the regular school program; although continuation high schools can also serve as an alternate route to a high school diploma.

In every school district where data have been available, continuation high schools show the highest dropout rates in the district. The four year dropout rates in continuation high schools of the largest urban school districts seem to mirror the national rate for continuation high schools of 50%. In California, these schools serve a variety of youths from various racial and language backgrounds, most economically disadvantaged, most with a history of failure in school. For all of them however, this is the last gas station before on the freeway--if students don't make it in continuation high school, they drop out.

What are continuation high schools like now? A review of data from the California Basic Education Data System (CBEDS) shows that, for the most part, these schools are remedial, with very narrow course offerings. The dilemma for many school districts is that broad course offerings require more teachers and more teachers cost money. Some districts have tackled this problem by establishing opportunity classes within their regular high schools. The classes are for students who are experiencing difficulties in regular classrooms. Classes are smaller; tutorial resources are provided to students whose reading and computation skills may be moderately appropriate for the course content; and students are allowed to make use of technology to support their learning--for example, calculators are used by students who have not mastered the basic computation algorithms.

Other school districts have found another alternative effective in reducing the numbers of students who leave continuation high school without graduating. These districts have decentralized continuation high schools by creating satellite schools which are located closer to where

students live. The idea is to reduce the need for students to travel long distances to get to school, which these districts have found to be a genuine problem.

6) **THE SIXTH AND FINAL AREA OF PROMISE RELATES TO SPECIAL INVOLVEMENT PROGRAMS FOR PARENTS AND COMUNITIES.**

This initiative is especially important with regard to Hispanic parents who may not be aware of all the programs and services that schools provide to improve students' prospects for future success. All of the research shows that only strong parent programs can influence one of the most critical problems that schools face--high absenteeism.

In California, the PTA has begun a drive to make schools more sensitive to the special needs of Hispanic parents. In part, this effort strives to provide parents with special information about the basic operation of schools in California and the importance of education in this country in keeping windows of future opportunity open for their children.

Another dropout prevention program that makes special provisions for parent involvement is Project HOLD (Helping to Overcome Learner Dropouts). This program was started by the Pajaro Valley Unified School District through Title IV-C funds. While the project no longer receives separate funding, most of its components have been incorporated into regular school programs or into the district's programs for migrant students. Project statistics show that more than 70% of participating students completed high school, 66% earned more units than a comparison group, and 75% moved out of the bottom quartile on a self esteem inventory. Moreover, these students increased their attendance and participation in school activities by 300% and they scored an impressive 22% higher academically. One central feature of this project is parent involvement. Parents participate in meetings about school operation and programs, and they are encouraged to become full partners in the education of their children.

The National Comission on Secondary Education for Hispanics has pointed out that coalitions between the school and responsible community agencies and institutions have tremendous potential for assisting and supporting troubled youth who might otherwise drop out of school. The Commission found that the most successful schools for Hispanics anywhere in the country are ones that have strong, enduring links to the communities they serve.

SUMMARY

I'll briefly state one or two things that can be done now to help schools implement the promising approaches that I have described.

- Many California school districts need help in getting a proper perspective on the dropout problem. Right now the issue is very confusing. Differences in definitions and accounting procedures make it difficult for schools and states to know the magnitude of the problem. California's Big 19 school districts have called for a statewide standard definition of dropouts and for standard procedures for calculating and reporting dropout statistics.

- Currently, most documentation of successfully operating dropout programs does not provide the kind of information that school districts, especially large urban school districts, need to have if they are to replicate the successes of promising dropout prevention and return programs.

- Strong parent and community involvement programs are critical in discouraging high absenteeism and in improving performances in school--two keys to reducing dropout rates. Research tells us emphatically that, while students may not always learn what we try to teach them, if students aren't there they certainly don't learn. Absenteeism is already acute in many urban high schools. Moreover, data show that chronic absenteeism that begins in the primary grades is devastating, almost always signaling the beginning of a cycle of poor performance and failure.

- Our legislators and state policy makers will need to remain sensitive to the fragile balance that exists between graduation and the economy. Action which closes off credited work experience or relevant career opportunities will surely have an undesired impact on dropout rates.

- Finally, schools do not have an adequate curriculum base for teaching students whose native language is not English. Resources are needed that better align English instruction and materials with the proficiencies that LEP students have.

I'll conclude my testimony here. All of the promising approaches just described involve alternatives to schooling as usual. They will require the support of parents, community leaders, and the public in general, and, of course, they will need support at all levels of government.

Again, I thank the Subcommittee for the invitation to contribute to these hearings.